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ABSTRACT

The journal synthesizing activity is intended to combine aspects of the formal essay with that of a diary. Activities associated with lecture topics are written up as short journal entries of approximately five typewritten pages and are turned in during the weekly class session at which the related topic is being discussed. The journal project encourages a direct encounter of student with material, breaking up the doldrum of a lecture-only method of presentations. This document provides a sample syllabus for a Jewish Religious Heritage class. Fifteen lecture topics are provided, with accompanying suggested journal activities. Activities are many and varied, providing an opportunity for the student to develop methodology and preserve or alter deepseated commitments in his view of himself, society, nature, and history. The journal synthesizing activity enables the teacher to be less of a knowledge dispenser, and more of a knowledge facilitator, who leads the student to make discoveries and articulate values and conclusions. (Author/NHM)

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THE JOURNAL SYNTHESIZING ACTIVITY

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Of the many aspects of learning process, perhaps the most frustrating is the cross purpose of students and professors. No where is this more keenly seen and felt than in an introductory class. The professor's lectures are for the most part not understood, and his intelligence is further insulted by the student's seeming anti-intellectualism. The professor blames his failure on his young charges. He vents his disatisfaction by popping quizzes, assigning busy work, asking trick questions on exams, and springing a host of other tricks which only his mind can issue. Students become apathetic, turn off, and consider class attendance a punishing jail sentence.

In reality the problem grows out of the diversified roles played by the professor and the student. The professor sees himself as a knowlege dispenser, developing a new generation of scholars who share his philosophy and concerns, and are willing to spend infinite hours reading, researching, writing, and discussing the problems at hand. The average student does not have the scholarly way as defined by the professor. He is a tradesman interested only in the bare essentials of the job; how, when, where, what is required of him to obtain his grade. He could **not care** less about schools of thought, philosophy, sociology, history, literary analysis, and theoretical abstractions; he is interested only in the here and now.

The nature of a college program, introductory classes in particular, is such that a professor does not trust his student and a student does not trust his professor. Students are regimented through a structured program which gives them little time to reflect, think, and mature. No wonder passivity and inertia set in. To rectify this problem the professor could help his student understand the beauty of being a professional and not a mere worker. One of the ways in which this can be done is to change the nature of the written assignment. In place of hourly examinations, mid-terms, and finals, which often represent the scribbled jottings derived from a lecture hour, there can be the journal synthesizing activity. The major pedagogical principle gained is the students will learn better and appreciate more their understanding of the subject matter if they are actively involved in learning rather than being passively taught. Learning involves not only information given but the recipient's discovery of what that knowledge means. The journal synthesizing activity enables the teacher to be less of a knowledge dispenser, and more of a knowledge facilitator, who leads the student to make discoveries and articulate values and conclusions.

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The Journal is intended to combine aspects of the formal essay with that of a diary. The entries are short exercises, five typewritten pages are recommended, though there is no limitation on length. Activities associated with lecture topics are written up as a journal entry and turned in during the weekly class session at which the related topic is being discussed. The activities are many and varied, and provide an opportunity for the student to develop methodology and preserve or alter deepseated comitments in his view of himself, society, nature, and history.

Using topics from a Jewish Religious Heritage class, the following Journal activities can be ascribed:

Topic 1 - Getting Started

Journal Activity: Students are asked to write their own definition of what is religion?; what is Judaism?; and who is a Jew? Included in this statement, is the students' understanding of Jewish identity viv-a-vis forces which seek to oppose or compliment it.

Topic 2 - Preliminaries About Religion and the Nature of Judaism
Journal Activity: Evaluate the mythic structure of classical Judaism against the traditional view of Israel's origins and destiny.

Topic 3 - Cycle of the Jewish Year: The High Holidays and the Nature Festivals
Journal Activity: Visit a synagogue, or a place of Jewish worship during the Jewish High Holidays (in the Spring semester, a Passover Seder). Participate in a religious service (worship or meditation) or have conversations with a member of the religious community. Describe your experiences in a journal entry.

Topic 4 - Cycle of the Jewish Year: The Minor Holy Days and the New Holy Days
Journal Activity:
Construct your own Jewish Holy Day. What is its message, identifying symbols, and meaningful rituals.

Topic 5 - Sacred Time and Sacred Space: The Shabbat
Spend 24 hours in a total Shabbat atmosphere, totally cutoff from the everyday experiences around you, by participating in either a Hillel Shabbaton (conventional, experimental) or a Chabad Shabbat (traditional, mystical, Hasidic). Evaluate your encounter, citing both positive and negative effects. What new outlooks, if any, upon life have altered or emerged as a result of the Shabbat experience.

Topic 6 - The Wheel of Life: Birth, Adolescence
Journal Activity: Make up a myth about the "beginnings of Israel" or create an alternate rite of passage to the Bar-Bat Mitzvah.

Topic 7 - The Wheel of Life: Marriage, Death
Journal Activity: Do a form critical analysis of the Jewish marrige ceremony. Or attempt to write a responsa on one aspect of Jewish marital relations and situation ethics. Or describe your thoughts about death and the great "beyond." Or survey Jewish burial practices and philosophy with those of non-Jews, and write a rationale on the Jewish way of dying. Or depict "death on my terms" using verse, poetry, visual arts, or fiction.

Topic 8 - Master of the Universe: The Still Silent Voice
Journal Activity: Describe an experience of the "death of God." Or of God's absence. Or of the eclipse of God. Or of a self-limited God. Or of an embattled God. Or of God in search of man.

Topic 9 - The Good Life: Man and the Human Predicament
Journal Activity: Go out into the field and make contact with one type of Jew Without Hope, e.g., the Jewish aged and dying, the Jewish poor, the Jewish runaway or addict, the Jewish retarded or mental sick, etc. Write up your experiences in a meeting-by meeting report. Be sure to include personal data on your subject, description of the state of your subject, progress made or needs being met, etc.

Topic 10 - Choose Life: The Jewish Ethic

Journal Activity: Comment on the following statement, either defending it or attacking it:

> The moral law of the Gospels asks the "natural man" to reverse his natural attitude towards himself and others, and to put the "other" in the place of the "self" --- that is, to replace straightforward egoism by inverted egoism. For the altruism of the Gospels is neither more nor less that inverted egoism. Altruism and egoism alike deny the individual as such all objective moral value and make him merely a means to a subjective end; but whereas egoism makes the "other" a means to the advantage of the "self", altruism does just the reverse. Judaism, however, gets rid of this subjective attitude entirely. It's morality is based on something abstract and objective, on absolute justice, which attaches moral value to the individual as such, without any distinction between the "self" and the "other" (from Ahad Ha'am, Between Two Opinions 1910).

-Or-

Discuss the Jewish view of Man and Nature in light of the following remark:

> In history there are three possible relationships of the spirit to the elemental forces. The first is the glorification of the elemental forces as such. We may call it the state of heathnism in the development of peoples, though there never was a pure heathenism in history. The second is the conquest of the elemental forces, the most illustrious example being Christianity. The third is the hallowing of the ele-elemental forces: not their glorification or conquest but their sanctification and consequently their transformation. The most striking instance of this relationship in the history of the Western World is Judaism (Martin Buber, from an adress delivered at the Lehrhaus in Frankfort-on-the-Main in 1934).

Topic 11 - Torah: Tradition and Commentary; Continuity and Change

Journal Activity: Write an evaluation of the textual readings in this section: explicate the author's arguments; include a list of questions needing to be clarified or pondered; and a list of issues suggested by the readings appropiate for class discussion or activity.

Topic 12 - Holy, Holy, Holy: Liturgy, Institutions, Diet, Dress

Journal Activity: Prepare a questionaire of at least ten questions on the role of the Synagogue or of Kashruth in Jewish life. Interview at least 15 informants collate the answers and tabulate the results.

-Or-

Investigate the Tay-Sachs questionaire which can be obtained from hospitals, Jewish community centers or synagogues. What are some of the historical, cultural, and social dimensions behind the survey?

Topic 13 - Hashoah - The 614th Commandment: "It's O.K. To Cry..."

Journal Activity: Create a sociodrama (simulation, role playing, etc.) entitled "The Last Jew Alive". Present at least five different views of Jewish belief in the post-Holocaust future. Use section readings and class lectures as a starting point.

-Or-

Make a collage of headlines from daily newspapers, dramatizing the history and/or complexity of the issues studied in this unit.

-Or-

View and analyze two media resources (e.g., the films: "Night and Fog", "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis", "The Shop on Main Street", "The Pawnbroker", or the plays: "The Deputy", "Incident at Vichy", etc) on the destruction of European Jewry.

Topic 14 - Encounter with Israel: People, Land, Destiny, World

Journal Activity: Write an essay or develop a short story around the theme of Israelis and Jews, the continuity (or discontinuity) of an identity. After all is said and done, what are the demands of the God of Israel upon the State of Israel?

Topic 15 - Hear O' Israel: Plural Models of Jewish Identity

Journal Activity: Hand back students' definition of religion and Judaism and ask them to reconsider the statements in light of their encounter with the course structure, lectures and readings.

The journal project permits a direct encounter of student with material; leads to a variety of student-oriented class activities and breaks up the doldrum of a lecture-only method of presentation. The depth, variety, nature and breadth of the Jewish experience is forcibly brought home if the student pursues his own journal preference in whatever media he deems most productive. For example, the confrontation of old-world, shtetl values with American values, the dilemma of the second generation, caught between the old values and the new, the question of Jewish radicalism and what happens to it in America, the question of Jewish "survival" in America, and finally, the sharpening of the question "what is a Jew?" as Americanization process continues can be portrayed in verse, poetry, music or photograph. If done properly, the journal activity can weave a thread of

continuity into complex and diversified material and make the course content more particular and personal.

The journal activity takes seriously the four sequential steps of a learning process: Confrontation, where the student experiences the idea, behavior, or object superficially; Analysis, where the student seriously probes the occasion or object in light of previous experience and knowledge; Interraction, where the student's mutual or reciprocal communication with others helps him benefit from their feelings, ideas, experiences with the reality under discussion; and Internalization, where by turning the new experience and sharing of ideas upon himself, the student reacts meaningfully to the new reality as it relates to him as an individual, and as a member of society as a whole. The journal activity deals in the main with real life situations and not theoretical abstractions; it permits the student to confront deep philosophical ideas in remarkable simplicity and convincing application; many new avenues of knowledge are opened up since the student relies heavily on field research in his confrontation with the subject matter and the problems at hand; students develop sensitivity and learn empathy when they work with living informants; finally, values, commitments, aspirations, etc., can be lastingly changed or developed or discovered when a student is engaged in researcher-subject ethical decision making and moral development, the twin pillars of a journal synthesizing activity.

The journal activity is less painful than many other writing methods in deepening one's understanding of the richness of minority history, culture, and contributions. It harmonizes the course curriculum of subject matter and activity, of subjects of study and experience. As a venture in human experience, it can prove more popular than historical reading in fashioning meaningful, lasting ties in the appreciation of an ethnic minority. It provides a more vivid and intimate insight into life than does a textbook. A text must generalize but a journal entry is personal and intimate. In addition, the student-researcher gives a different dimension of what "human awareness" means than is found in the "heavy" findings of an anthropologist, theologian, historian, social scientist, etc.

In sum, a journal synthesizing activity probes different bodies of theory about phenomena, depending on the problem solving purposes. The merits of a journal entry are evaluated on the basis of its content, simple or complex, and also in terms of its aims and goals. For example, the prospectus of a journal activity in the Jewish Religious Heritage class is constructed to obtain the following major goals: (1) to be aware that the Jewish religious tradition has to deal with peoplehood, worldview, and life style; and (2) to realize that the culture, religion, and history of the Jewish people are mutually interdependent. Furthermore, it is possible to reject an activity if the theory upon which it is based is not accountable in demonstration and this it shares with other teaching endeavors. Thus, a journal activity in the validity of the Halachic process is not possible, but as an illustration of Halacha it is acceptable. In effect, a journal activity does not offer solutions to problems, but rather a modus vivendi, in which different viewpoints may compete for acceptance, and in the end be implemented though not receiving total support by all.

Examples of journal activities done by students in the Jewish Religious Heritage class taught at Los Angeles Valley during the academic year 1974-75 will be handed out to those in attendance at the Academic Study of Religion Section of the AAR on Saturday, November 1, from 2-5 p.m. The selections will be discussed in light of the rationale of a journal synthesizing activity mentioned above and in accordance with the appendix, a section from the Human Awareness Program Guide published by the Office of Instructional Development, Los Angeles Community Colleges (August 1974). Also, a select bibliography in the study of the ethnic minority will be handed out.

APPENDIX

The following are examples of specific concepts and historical developments pertaining to a college Human Awareness Program published by the office of Instructional Development, Los Angeles Community Colleges, (August 1974):

a. Concept of culture
   1. Social and psychological factors in development of culture
   2. Effects on personality and perception
   3. Value system: norms, beliefs, behavior
   4. Unity and diversity in cultural patterns
   5. Dynamics of change
   6. Cultural institutions
   7. Race, ethnicity, nationality, religion

b. Themes and issues in American History
   1. Development of minority and majority groups in the United States
   2. The melting pot versus cultural pluralism
   3. Distribution and utilization of power
   4. Distribution of poverty and affluence

c. Effects of discrimination on racial, ethnic, national origin cultural and religious groups in American society.
   1. Institutional aspects: schools, government and legal systems, news media, business and economy, religion the arts, community and public attack.

After the introduction of concepts and historical developments participation in practical field assignments of similar experiences to allow interaction with racial and ethnic groups is recommended. These activities should relate to the following:

1. Definitions of equal education as related to school and classroom
2. Assessment of students' abilities and achievements
3. Differences in student learning styles
4. Teacher, family and societal expectations of students
5. Self-image of students
6. Concepts of desegregation, integration, and pluralism as related to the school and classroom
7. Role models
8. Experience in wider community, including observation of community organizations and how they function
9. Militancy and activism in the community
10. Conflict between different minority and ethnic groups
11. Structure and governance of schools
12. Curriculum and instructional materials
13. Communication modes and skills of students
14. Self-image assessment of participants with particular reference to intergroup concerns
15. Observation of successful teachers and their methods

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